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not only without intolerance and bigotry of any kind, but with the enlightened recognition that ultimate fixity of conception is here unattainable, and that each succeeding age must be held free to fashion the mystery in accordance with its own needs; then, in opposition to all the restrictions of materialism, I would affirm this to be a field for the noblest exercise of what, in contrast with the knowing faculties, may be called the creative faculties of man. Here, however, I must quit a theme too great for me to handle, but which will be handled by the loftiest minds ages after you and I, like streaks of morning cloud, shall have melted into the infinite azure of the Past."

Here are evidences not only of a philosophy rising above the dead level of materialism, but also of the fire of hope and faith which burns bright in the heart of every man.

JOHN GRIER HIBBEN.

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### STREET BEGGING AS A FINE ART.

THE recent enormous and even alarming increase in the number of beggars in New York is accounted for by the police authorities on the ground that a large number of professional mendicants are drawn to New York from all parts of the country at this season of the year by the well-founded belief that means are so ample there and that charity is so free.

This horde of beggars, which seems to have been suddenly let loose upon the streets of the metropolis, consists for the most part of surly-looking men, with unkempt beards, bleared eyes, and threatening manners. Sturdy and impudent, they are to be found on the streets both uptown and downtown from early in the evening until daylight. In the neighborhood of the big hotels they are especially prolific. Fifth avenue from Fourteenth street to Forty-second street seems to be their favorite haunt. Here they lie in wait in the doorways, from whence they suddenly dart out at the passer-by, fall in with his gait and insist upon alms.

They began about a month ago by frightening women into giving them money, but lately they have been begging from men. When refused, they are usually content to say something insulting, although in some cases they almost use threats to extort money. The stabbing of a gentleman recently at his doorway on Fifth avenue by one of these beggars to whom he had refused alms is only an instance of a trifle more violence on the part of the mendicant than is exhibited by other members of the tribe which now infests the streets of New York.

In the old days, when every town sought to take care of its own folk, the beggar who came from a distance and was not a handicraftsman was put in the stocks or was roughly brought before the magistrates and carefully whipped before being started on his way towards elsewhere. This was all very pleasant and patriarchal. It presupposed that every man could and would take care of his own; that there was something to do for every one who would work; and that, in fact, no one ought to be simply a beggar or vagabond.

The professional beggar is not a modern innovation, by any means. Readers of the *Spectator* will recall "Scarecrow," the famous London beggar who, having disabled himself in his right leg, asked alms all day in order to get a warm supper at night. According to John Timbs, the "Rufflers," to whom we often find mention in the literature of the seventeenth century, were troops of idle vagrants who infested Lincoln's Inn Fields. They assumed the characters of maimed soldiers who had suffered

in the great rebellion, and found a ready prey in the people of fashion and quality who drove by. Indeed, it is made clear by contemporary allusion in comedies that this square was the regular haunt of bogus cripples who lived by mendicancy, which they carried on in the most barefaced and even intimidating manner.

It is related that George IV., when Prince of Wales, once attended a beggars' carnival in London, *incognito*. He had not been there long when the chairman, addressing the company and pointing to the Prince, said, "I call upon that ere gemman with a shirt for a song." The Prince, as well as he could, was excused upon a friend who accompanied him promising to sing instead, which the latter did amid great applause. The health of the Prince and his friend having been drunk, and duly responded to, they departed in order to afford the company an opportunity to fix their different routes for the ensuing day's business; for at that time the professional beggars of London used to have a general meeting several times during the year at which they were divided into companies, each company having its particular walk. In those days their earnings varied much, some getting as much as five shillings a day. Most of the professional beggars in London to-day—and their name is legion—emanate from two or three common lodging-houses. The most populous of these, which is known as "The Dispensary," supports an individual known as a "scriver," who earns a living by manufacturing the pathetic signboards which the sham cripples and bogus blind men carry round their necks. In Paris, as is well known, the professional beggars hold regular weekly meetings at which the routes to be followed by the members of the guild are mapped out by a standing committee. They have an organ of their own, called the *Journal des Mendicants*, which appears twice a week. From a recent issue the following curious advertisement is taken: "Wanted—To engage a cripple for a seaside resort. Good references and a small deposit required." This queer announcement is explained by the fact that the proprietors of hotels and boarding-houses at fashionable French watering-places assume that visitors would be disposed to give alms if an opportunity were afforded them; and as they cannot very well do the begging themselves, they engage professional beggars to whom they grant permission to solicit alms on their premises, and the beggars in return pay them one-half of their daily receipts.

New Yorkers undoubtedly suffer more from the tribe of beggars than the residents of any other city in this country. The professional beggar makes New York his happy hunting-ground, and dresses for his character like any other actor. "He is a Lazarus by day," says a writer, "but at night he puts off his rags and fares sumptuously—then he is Dives. He is an artist, and his art is lying." In the poorer quarters of the city on a Saturday night, when the poor man and his hard-working wife have received their pittance the professional beggar is sure to be on hand, with his detestable whine, his lies, his rags, his professional face, ready to coax the money from these poor people, and to get *in one night* from the charitable more money than the industrious man has got from a whole week's work.

Nor is the occupation very unpleasant. Inured to the open air, beggars are much healthier than the pent-up factory hand or shop-girl. Their "looped and windowed raggedness" is half sham; when it is not so, use has made it pleasant, and they are ragged from choice. Shoeless they are, or their shoes have holes, as ours ought to have—some of the advanced of us declaring that shoes as a whole are a mistake. They have little care or

anxiety, except the fun of dodging the policeman. They have little pride, and therefore can consort with more open and violent thieves. Actually they are thieves themselves, for they take money for work which they have not done. Moreover, they shamelessly impose upon those who really pity and befriend them.

The manner in which they impose upon people we all know; to what extent they do so may be guessed. A well-known clergyman recently set his wits to work to relieve distress, but, being a wise Christian, he made inquiries *before* he gave relief. Of two hundred beggars, only two—one per cent.—gave true addresses, and of those two, one succeeded in cheating him.

Professional beggars pass under various aliases. They change their addresses to avoid detection. They travel from city to city. The Charity Organization Society has among its records the history of one old man who collected something like eighteen thousand dollars by years of industrious begging. His wife and children were well-to-do, but although very much ashamed of the business, they were unable to make him desist. He had done the thing so long that he could not be persuaded to give it up.

The ruses resorted to by some of these professional beggars are not without interest. There is, for instance, the lamplighter, whose pitiful story has unloosened the purse-strings of so many generous but unwary people. His story is that he used to light lamps on your street. He remembers you very well; but perhaps you have forgotten him. But knowing your face so well, he ventures to ask for a small loan. At this point he begins to tell you a most beautiful and pathetic story.

Then there was the young man who dropped the crust of bread upon the sidewalk, then covertly picked it up, glanced around to see that he was not observed and hurried away. A new character has recently appeared upon the streets in the shape of a young woman of lady-like appearance, handsomely dressed, who has accidentally lost her pocketbook and wants just enough to pay her carfare home. A lady answering to this description was seen by several different people in different parts of the city during the past few weeks.

A few years ago there appeared in New York, and afterwards in various other cities, a mild old lady with a handsome daughter. Both of them were very refined in appearance and clearly in a great and sudden distress, of which they were very reluctant to speak. The story they told of the bereavement and sudden misfortune which had come to them was so pathetic that it kept them in funds for a number of years, until the fraud was finally discovered and their real history published. There have been no reports of this couple for many months now. They are probably working in some other city. But as these professional beggars make their appearance periodically, it is pretty near time for them to show up again. And then these people invariably return to New York sooner or later. It seems to have a sort of fascination for them.

Experience teaches that a man who will make a business of begging will steal. Professional beggars must therefore be hunted down and prosecuted just the same as any other sort of criminals. As the law now stands, persons who beg can be punished, and rightly so, we think, for that offence. One thing is certain, that they ought to be either relieved or punished. This being conceded, it follows that at least ninety-five out of every hundred habitual beggars are professional rogues, idle persons brought up to beggary, who cheat the good, prevent relief from coming

into the hands of the needy, live a miserable, vicious, and wicked life, rob society of whatever each of them owes to God's world in return for the benefits that he gets, trouble society with infinite evils, and should be most severely punished, and by force exterminated—that is to say, converted into working members of the community by being set to some employment more or less profitable.

The relation of the vagrant to the criminal class is of the closest character; it is hard to say where the one begins and the other ends. Every vagabond is an idle fellow, quite ready to turn his hand to the easiest way of getting money. When he cannot cheat, he steals; if stealing is beyond his reach, he begs in a whining tone. That in New York he subsists almost wholly by begging is owing to the ceaseless goodness of the public. Whatever New York may be to the poor, honest, and industrious workman, it is a land flowing with milk and honey to the idle. The popular myth that our streets are paved with gold is practically realized by this class; and what a base class it is! The more we think of the enormity of the swindle they are engaged in, the more indignant we become. It does not hurt the rich so much as the poor man. The giver is swindled out of his money, and God will reward him—indeed, his conscience already rewards him—for his deed, if done in true charity; but the poor, modest, starving man, who is dying of hunger in some miserable abode, *that* is the man who is robbed by the professional beggar.

"All of these people," says a report, "are more or less debased; their intellectual faculties are of the lowest order; their moral sense is stifled or inactive through suspicion or dishonesty." Laziness, the mother of all evil, is at the bottom of this criminal cupidity, but the immediate parent of all is indiscriminate charity. There is no nobility so great as that exhibited by him who beneficently labors for the good of all; but so-called charity has thrown all natural feelings on such matters quite out of gear. Mendicancy, attracted by the feelings of greed of getting some of the large prizes in our institutions and charities, is raised into a scientific profession; and what is easily obtained is, according to a universal law, as lightly spent. People get by beggary, and spend in drunkenness.

It is not necessary for individuals to take matters into their own hands. Indeed, they should not, for if they do they will increase the difficulties of everybody who tries to relieve suffering in a rational way. Giving on the street will increase the number of mendicants of the worst class, and people must not be deceived by the piteous realism of the plea, for eloquence and plausibility are a sure sign of the artist and the undeserving specialist.

The remedy lies in systematic charity, instead of the practice pursued by the careless giver. The criminal and vagabond class has been cultivated and fostered by foolish philanthropists and by an over-generous and soft-hearted public. It is useless for work, for almost anything; it is utterly demoralized. It is hard to say whether its men or women are worst. At any rate they are not to be pitied, but to be hated until the crime has gone out of them; not to be fostered, but to be cut up. Leniency with them is a fault; easy good nature is a crime, for mistaken kindness to them means cruelty of the worst kind towards the industrious and deserving poor with whom they are brought into contact, and whose progeny they too often ruin and corrupt.

K. K. BENTWICK.